

Secret Whispers by consultingpiemaker

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Summary:

Will had set his mind on telling Mike something he wanted to tell him for a really long time. And when he was lying awake during one of their sleepovers, not able to sleep at all, he finally told Mike the truth about himself.

Secret Whispers

Author's Note:

Will Byers is gay.

Don't listen to "When It's Cold I'd Like to Die" by Moby when reading this :)

There are some moments in your life that you mentally prepare yourself for for years and years and then suddenly they're there, they're happening. You don't know whether to laugh or cry because it is scary in that moment, but the weight that is finally being lifted off your shoulders is such a relief.

For Will this moment came on a Friday night in November, a few minutes past midnight to be exact. His rapid heartbeat made it difficult to concentrate, let alone to sleep.

Mike was lying right in front of Will's bed on a mattress which might as well have Mike's name on it because he was the only one who had ever slept on it. Will could hear his rhythmic breathing and the occasional noise when he rolled over in his sleep.

If this sleepover would be like the ones they used to have a year earlier, they would both still be up, the circular light beams of their torches dancing across the ceiling and walls and sometimes landing on each other's faces, completely accidentally of course. The room would be filled with suppressed laughter, careful not to wake up Joyce or Jonathan.

But it was quiet now. No light, no laughter.

Will was lying on his back and staring at the ceiling as if he'd find the courage there hidden in the shadows to tell Mike what he had wanted to tell him for so long. He was gay, he knew that for sure. He liked boys and he might even have a little crush on his best friend. And judging by how close he was to actually hyperventilate then, he could no longer deny that last fact. *Shit.*

He was sweating and there was a shiver running down his spine that made him feel cold at the same time. It was like a fever that would keep you bedridden for days, making you question how you could have possibly ever felt alright in your life. His mouth was dry and it made him wish he hadn't forgotten to put a glass of water next to his bed. If he would have something to drink, he would-

Will knew very well that he was only making up excuses now, like he always did. He had been in this situation before, many times actually. *So close* to bearing his soul to his best friend, but there had always been something that kept him from doing it. Usually that had been other people interrupting the private moment he shared with Mike, causing him to shut away completely again, pretending like it was just another normal day and not one that could potentially change his whole life.

But there was no one else here now, it was just him and Mike in his bedroom. It should fill him with joy, especially considering the events of the past few weeks. For the first time in over a year Will felt okay, the sole inhabitant of his body. He was the only one in control over himself – except for the feelings he couldn't control and that kept him awake at night. But he knew from Jonathan that this did not have to do with shadow monsters, it was something everyone could feel.

Will's heart picked up speed as he made the decision that *this was it*, he would finally let someone in on his secret and he hoped that it would make him feel free.

"Mike?" Will's voice sounded like he was crying, so he quietly cleared his throat before asking, "Are you awake?"

The sleeping bag fell down from Mike's shoulder as he propped himself up on his elbows to look at his friend. "What's wrong?" he asked, concern in his voice. It dawned on Will that Mike might have been awake this whole time as well, not being able to sleep either.

"Nothing," Will quickly replied when he sensed the fear radiating off Mike, like he was only waiting for Will to say, "I don't think it's over yet." Mike knew that the shadow monster had left Will alone, but it would take him a while to not tense up whenever Will said his name. He had heard him scream *Mike* too many times.

"Are you okay?" Still, it was difficult to turn off the immediate sense of terror.

Will nodded. "Yeah, I just need to talk to you."

"What is it?"

"It's difficult to talk about," Will answered and sat up in his bed. He was actually glad that they were having this conversation *now*, in the dark, with the opportunity to hide under the covers. He leaned his back against the shelf behind his bed, careful not to knock off any of the toys he was keeping there. He pulled up the covers to his shoulders to stay warm.

As if to encourage him, Mike moved closer to the bed and leaned against it. "It's alright, Will," he said. "You know you can talk with me about everything."

"It's just... I-I feel like I'm a freak." Will despised this word. He had been called a freak too many times for it not to leave a bitter taste in his mouth.

"Well, I'm one too," Mike answered without hesitation. In this regard he was just like Jonathan, which is probably why Will felt so comfortable talking to them in the first place. There was something about the way they approached a problem. They always knew what to say to make Will feel better, to make him feel, well, less like a freak. He loved them both dearly, but not only because of that.

"No, not—" Will stopped abruptly. How could he put this into words that could actually leave his mouth without him ending up stuttering? His desperation and inability to express it became evident in the sharp intake of breath followed by silence. He shook his head, which Mike saw as a dark silhouette in front of the drawn curtains. There was a crack in the middle through which moonlight shone into the room, making the curtains look like a door that is almost closed except for that tiny crack of light from the other room. "Not like that. I don't mean that people think I'm a freak because I'd rather read comics than, I don't know, play basketball, but because I'm not... normal."

Mike rose up a bit more as if for Will's defense. "But that's not your fault, Will, and you know that. It could have happened to anyone."

"I don't mean the Upside Down."

"Oh, okay."

Will took a deep breath. "I'm not normal because...I-I don't like girls."

"Oh." Mike took in this information, not thinking much about it at first. But when he realized what Will was saying, the second, now meant as an understanding "Oh." died on his lips.

Will had gotten really quiet. "That's why I'm a freak. Because...I-I don't like girls, I, uh—" He threw up his right hand and let it fall back on his legs. He had never actually said it out loud.

"Like boys." Mike finished the sentence for him. In the dim moonlight he could see Will press his lips together, as if he was trying to smile while being in pain, like someone too proud to admit that he was hurting. Even though this was the first time Mike heard of this, he felt like he should have known. It just made sense. He looked at his friend, reduced to a stuttering mess who only looked straight ahead and didn't dare to look into Mike's direction. "I had no idea," Mike said and wanted to apologize for that fact, even though it was something that he had no control over.

Will just shrugged, of all things. "I just needed to tell someone." To Mike he had never looked so small like he did in that moment. "This has always been on my mind, Mike, for years."

"I didn't know."

"I guess my dad and Troy did." Will was shaking. "Sometimes when my dad was in a bad mood and he'd see me reading X-Men, he'd yell at me and call me a—" He couldn't say it out loud. That word had cut his heart like a knife, the scars still there, a constant reminder of what his father thought of him. He had cried himself to sleep countless times because of that, asking whoever listened in on his thoughts, *Why me?* He started sobbing, it was no longer just silent tears. He buried his face in his hands. "I feel like the whole world is

against me."

Mike couldn't take it any longer. He got up and sat down next to Will. And even though he knew it wouldn't make him stop crying, he put an arm around Will's shoulders. He was hoping that it would make Will realize he wasn't alone, that Mike was there for him. He let Will cry for a moment because he knew too well that sometimes that was just what you needed to feel better. Let it all out.

Eventually, Will's sobs died down. Mike still held him in his arms. It had gotten eerily quiet in the room, the only sound right then – at least the only sound that mattered – was Will's heavy breathing. Mike felt a pang in his chest and he wished that there was someone he could punch. "I'm so sorry, Will," he said quietly.

"You don't have to be sorry, you're one of the good guys." Will's voice was deeper than usual, but at least he'd lifted his head and rested his chin on his intertwined hands.

Mike tilted his head and leaned over, putting his head on Will's shoulder blade. "You're one of the good guys, too."

"Thank you," Will replied, appreciating both the words and the physical comfort. "But you're better."

Mike laughed, which put a smile on Will's face, even if it was barely noticeable. "Why?"

"Because you're always there for me," Will said. "Always," he repeated in a whisper, remembering all the times in the past months when he came to from one of his now memories and would see the faces of the three people he loved the most right by his side. He cared about Mike as much as about Jonathan or his mother, only it was a different kind of caring. Family is not something you choose, they're either there for you or they're not. But friends are people you *do* choose, and Mike had come into his life and stayed. "You're here right now."

"And I will never leave. You don't have to go through this alone." He nudged Will with his elbow. "You're stuck with me forever, whether you like it or not."

"Lucky for me I like it." Will straightened his back which made Mike move away his head to lean his back against the shelf right next to the other boy. Will already missed the feeling of his arms around him, but this was nice too. "I just—" His voice cracked and he quickly wiped away some tears with his sleeve. He didn't want to cry again. "There have been so many people who said something to me that made me feel bad, that made me feel sick about who I am."

"Screw them. They don't matter."

"I'm just scared, Mike. I'm so *fucking* scared," Will whispered. Mike had heard these words too many times in the past few weeks, even if that was under different circumstances. Mike had thought that it was finally over, that he had his best friend back from the shadow monster, and it hurt him even more to know that Will was fighting a battle that no one was aware of because you couldn't see it. Even worse, what Will was scared of was something that you couldn't fight with a slingshot. Will was the bravest person Mike knew, and he had endured too many awful things to be upset about *this* now.

"I don't know if you remember but you've survived monsters from another world, Will. You're tougher than you think you are."

Will was smiling. And Mike was smiling because Will was finally smiling again. "I guess. Thank you for not freaking out, by the way."

"No reason to freak out."

"But seriously, Mike, I'm scared of telling the others. Like, what will Lucas and Dustin say? They might not take it as well as you."

"But you're Will the Wise, you're our cleric. It just wouldn't work without you."

"But that's just a game, Mike. What about in real life?"

"You'll always have me, I can promise you that," Mike assured him. He would write it on a poster and hang it right above Will's bed if he would ever forget that.

"You know, when I was taken into the Upside Down, I thought it was because I deserved it. Because I don't belong in this world."

"Are you serious? That's bullshit!"

"Is it?"

Mike had his mouth open, ready to protest against something like he'd never protested before. "Yes, Will! There is nothing wrong with loving someone. And just because you happen to—" He stopped and lowered his voice before continuing, "like boys does not justify any of the bad things that happened to you."

God, Will loved Mike. In that moment more than ever.

"And don't worry about Dustin and Lucas. They'll be fine with it, and if they aren't, then they don't deserve to have you in their lives anyway. What about your family? Do they know?"

"They don't, I haven't told them," Will answered. "Actually, Jonathan might know, but I'm not sure. There have been things he said to me, that I shouldn't like things just because people say I should." That made Mike smile. It was such a Jonathan thing to do.

For a while the two boys just sat on Will's bed in silence even though both of their minds were racing with thoughts.

Then Mike broke the silence. "Can I ask you something?"

"Yes?"

"Have you ever—" Mike started, his cheeks heating up at the thought, "kissed a boy? I mean, how do you know that you...you know."

Will wanted to laugh at how his heart jumped at the mere thought of kissing boys. "I just do. I think I've always known. How do *you* know that you like girls? Have you ever kissed one?"

"I have," Mike answered, much to Will's surprise. "El," he clarified.

"Oh." Will couldn't help feeling betrayed, both because Mike had kept this from him and because *he* wanted to kiss Mike. Suddenly painfully aware of how close they were, he blushed. "I don't have to kiss someone to know if I like them." The thought alone of being close to a boy was enough to know that this was what Will wanted. It felt

right, and the thought always put a smile on his face.

"Can I ask you something else, then?"

"Anything."

Mike smiled. "Have you ever liked someone? I mean...*liked* liked."

They've never really talked about this stuff before, about girls – or boys – and crushes. And with Max it had become quite obvious that of the group it was Dustin and Lucas who were more interested in girls and talking about them than Mike and Will were. Mike began to think that maybe they *should* have talked about this, especially if it would have spared Will from feeling so miserable all these years.

"I don't know. It's difficult, especially for me, because...when I like someone I—"

"You keep saying *someone*. You can start saying *boy* if you want to, it's fine. This is what it's all about, right? I mean, *I'm* a boy, so this will be the manliest conversation you will have ever had."

Will was speechless, at least for a few seconds. "Sometimes I wonder why I have you as a friend."

"Didn't we just establish that?"

Will raised his hands. "Okay, okay, I'm doing it. So listen to me... When I like a *boy*," he looked at Mike with raised eyebrows, and Mike had a smug grin on his face and he tapped the tips of his fingers together, clapping quietly, "I can never tell if I want them to be my friend or if it's more."

"So how do you feel about me?"

"What?"

"How do you feel about me?"

"Oh Michael Wheeler, I've been in love with you since kindergarten," Will said and fluttered his eyelashes.

Mike clutched his chest. "I'm flattered."

They looked at each other and that was all it took before they broke into laughter at the same time. Will kept hitting Mike's shoulder to remind him to keep quiet, but he couldn't care less if his mother or Jonathan would wake up from the noise. It's not like this would be the first time that would have happened.

Will bit his lip and looked at Mike when he was still laughing and actually wiping away tears from his eyes. He had missed this, being around Mike and feeling like everything is going to be alright. *Mike* meant comfort, never-ending curiosity, loud laughter, woolen pullovers, striped shirts, AV club, bike races, and above all the comfort of knowing that no matter what happened, he would be there.

The laughter had died down but left grins on the faces of the boys. Mike turned around to look at Will. "Who knows, maybe I like you more than a friend and I will never find out if I don't kiss you."

"Ha! Funny," Will said, definitely not laughing. Without having to say it out loud, they both knew that they were tired. Mike stood up from Will's bed, but not before giving Will a last comforting tap on the shoulder.

"Thanks for telling me about this, Will. I appreciate it."

Will pressed his lips together. "Well, thank you for being you, Mike."

"You're welcome," Mike answered and bowed his head. Will giggled. "You know, ever since you came back there was something about you that felt off, like you weren't yourself. But this? This is you."

"Don't make me cry again," Will mumbled.

Mike cackled quietly as he got back into his sleeping bag. "Good night, Will."

"Night, Mike."

Will lied down on his back again and pulled up the covers to his chin. He couldn't believe that this had really just happened. Not even an

hour ago his fear had tormented him, but now the secret was out.

And for the first time in what felt like forever Will slept peacefully, his dreams free of monsters of any kind.

The next morning Will and Mike sat at the kitchen table, eating all the eggs and toast that Jonathan made for them. Joyce entered the room, checked the time, and smiled at the boys.

"You two must have had a fun night," she said. Jonathan looked at her with a questioning look on his face, so she explained, "Didn't you hear them laughing?"

Mike expected Joyce to tell them both to be quieter the next time, but instead she stepped closer to the table and smoothed down Will's hair at the back where it was sticking out a bit. "I love you," she said and grabbed her bag and car keys. "I'll be back in an hour, but Jonathan is here." She left and Will and Jonathan called "Bye, mom!" after her.

Mike knew that Joyce loved Will, anyone could see that. And Jonathan loved Will, too. There was a lot of love in this family. Mike noticed that there was only one slice of toast left, so he quickly grabbed it and put it on his plate.

"Hey!" Will complained and kicked him lightly underneath the table, but he was laughing.

"We've got more, nobody is going to starve," Jonathan said, also laughing.

Mike joined in on the laughter and looked over at his best friend. Will was going to be fine.